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BRITISH SECULAR INSTITUTE

OF

Communication and Propagandism.

REPORT OF THE FLEET STREET HOUSE, PART II.,

FOR 1857.

THE previous Report presented a combined summary of the business property and Propagandist property of the House, with a view to show those who might make loans to it (until Trustees assumed the entire responsibility) the amount of the pecuniary security in the hands of the Director, who alone was answerable for such loans. The previous Report was an historical and business report; this shows the whole moneys received for Propagandist purposes, and the aggregate disbursements on this account from 1854 to 1858.

1.—Until now I have conducted the House in the hope and expectation that the expenses incurred on account of it would be very early cleared, and the responsibility of conducting it transferred to others. But circumstances have occurred, which may be briefly related, which convince me that the most likely course to insure the objects of the House being carried into effect, will be for me to act upon a resolution passed at a meeting of Promoters convened in London, and which is now submitted to those not present on that occasion. With one exception the meeting unanimously 'passed a resolution expressive of confidence in Mr. Holyoake, recommending him to take the business into his own hands, to recall and cancel the debentures, clear up any misunderstanding which may have arisen, and inform the Promoters, etc., of the exact position they hold towards the "Fleet Street House."'*

2.—In the previous report I said, in express terms, that 'until the loans and accounts of the House were paid or cancelled, *I necessarily held the property*† in trust for *these claimants*, to whom I was personally responsible.'‡ I held it in trust—first, for those who had advanced loans; next, for the suggested trustees. In the interim, for the security of loan holders, the property remained vested in my hands, and 'has not ceased to remain so.'§ To

* *Vide Investigator* for January. Mr. Maughan's report, p. 182.

† Namely, the lease of fourteen years, from 1853 to 1867; the fixtures taken on entering the house; the fixtures and furniture added in 1853-4; the right of the 'previous business.'

‡ *Vide* 'History of the Fleet Street House,' p. 23.

§ This was the phrase, and this the sense in which it was said, in a statement to the meeting of promoters of November 29th ult.

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expense of Printing.]

tamper with this property as public property, or to hand it over to the control of a miscellaneous committee, who have undertaken no pecuniary responsibility whatever, and who would not be recognised by the loan holders, would be an act of dishonesty which would cause the doors of the House to be closed in disgrace in six weeks.

3.—When the previous report was issued, there was reason to believe that there would be furnished means of repaying all demands before 1857, which was the cause of that time being named for the transfer.

4.—During the four years that the House has been opened, I have expended on account of it £2,745, and received only £1,221, leaving a deficit of £1,523 on Propagandist outlays. Any current expenses, or losses of a purely business nature, are not brought forward, or in any way charged in this report. The business is kept distinct from the Propagandism. The total business income of the House for 1857 has been £102 less than the expenditure. If trustees now assumed the direction, they would necessarily have to become responsible for this current business deficiency, and the Propagandist deficiency of £1,523, and supply sufficient capital to conduct the business more advantageously than has been possible with the limited means at command.

5.—Under these circumstances, no trustees can be expected to come forward. The only gentleman who from the first joined with me in any security to loan holders (a gentleman to whom we are under well-known obligations), gave £200 in lieu of his indefinite responsibility, and with the view of diminishing my own. The difficulties which have arisen through the proposal to transfer the house I will now state.

6.—Nearly all the subscriptions given, have been given with the express desire that I should expend them to the best of my judgment in advancing the objects of Freethought; and the whole of the moneys lent have been lent on the condition that I should be personally responsible for their repayment, as required. So soon, however, as it became apparent that I intended to make over the House to others, to hold and conduct on their own responsibility, the largest loan holder wrote to say that such a step would be a breach of faith to him and others, who regarded my personal possession and interest in the property as their sole security for repayment of their advances; that they knew nothing of trustees, and had no confidence in a democratic committee, who were in office to-day and gone to-morrow, and who very likely would dispute away the property and business connections in three months. Another loan holder wrote to say that he would give his loan to enable me to create a permanent Institute, but otherwise he should retain his right to it. As my intention of transferring precluded me from accepting this offer, this gentleman retains his claim to his loan to this day. After the 'History of the House' appeared, in which my intention of relinquishing it to others was first made prominent, several loan holders began to call in their loans, and as sudden repayment was impossible, some commenced law proceedings, and many have been the times when I have had to set out into the country to lecture and hold debates (with threats of writs in my pocket) in order to earn money with which to satisfy these claims.* In some cases, persons who had given their loans insisted upon repayment, and repayment has been made. Had no proposals been made of transferring the House, none of these suits would have been instituted. In another way the proposal proved disastrous. Assistance, previously promised, was declined to be rendered. It became impossible to procure capital for business purposes, as, it was said, I could no longer prove a *clear* possession of the property as security. Indeed, it was said to be doubtful whether the *book stock* of the shop might not be claimed by the Promoters. Indeed, some time ago, Mr. Bradlaugh (an attorney's clerk), served me with what he called a legal notice of 'co-partnership,' on the part of himself and associates—who never had and never intended to incur any pecuniary responsibility whatever. Another evil has been that servants in the House disregarded

* During my debate with Mr. Grant in Glasgow, every post brought some imperative demand for money, and I had to remit the whole proceeds awarded to me, to the landlord for rent.

their duty and my orders, believing they could appeal to the 'Promoters' against my authority for justification or countenance. When Wilks carried away the books of his department, he was encouraged by the idea that he could plead a 'co-partnership.*' Next, Farrah set up a claim of 'partnership,' and was advised, in my presence, to carry away the books of the publishing department, and he did lock them up before me. He was told that he had a right to carry away the till, or to cart away the stock of the shop. One lawsuit with Wilks being rendered inevitable, a second one was threatened, unless I submitted to a demand of £150 as compensation for services Mr. Farrah assumed to have rendered, and preparations were made to enforce his demands by proceedings in Bankruptcy against the House; threats were also held out of Chancery proceedings. One demand was made to carry into court certain books of the House, which would make many private names public. It was removing these two servants from the House which Mr. Maughan represented as 'business changes,' which 'it was feared would seriously impair its efficiency as a public institution.' My brother Austin, who has voluntarily shared every possible responsibility with me, has resumed the Publishing, thus retaining ourselves the personal control of all proceedings, for which we alone are answerable, and which experience proves cannot be well entrusted to others. Since entering upon the Fleet Street House, the connections acquired have been different in nature and extent from any possessed by the Secularist party before. Understood confidence has been the basis of these communications. Freethought is yet a penal privilege to many, and we can acquire no power without the ability to protect friends and allies. Part of the losses mentioned in the balance sheet, originated, it is true, in inability to take the oath. For this there was no remedy, except by my brother appearing as acting partner in all transactions of a business nature.† But a serious part of these losses was incurred through the House being regarded as public property, of which many have taken advantage, and left the responsibility and the jeopardy they created to me—accusing me of severity if I was strict, charging me with want of business capacity where I was lenient. The resolution cited, par. 1 (this report) was intended to, and will put an end to these disadvantages, which must destroy the House as well as embarrass me unless obviated.

7.—The 'Propagandist Fund' (see balance sheet, p. 4) includes all subscriptions received under that name since the opening of the House in November, 1853. All sums received previously to the date of *Reasoner*, No. 393—that is, from 1846 to 1853—are accounted for in the previous report. As the following is a balance sheet of all moneys received by me from *the public*, the £39 received from *myself* as proceeds of my own lectures (acknowledged *Reasoner*, No. 554), and similar proceeds for 1857, are of course not included in the items in question.

8.—The purchase of the 'lease' secured the possession of the position in Fleet Street. The 'fixtures' existing in the House in 1853 were required, by Mr. Carvalho, to be taken. The 'alterations' were indispensable to adapt it to its new uses. The 'previous business' was valuable as giving unity of representation to Freethought. On 'purely business grounds' I should not have incurred these expenses, because no Freethought business possible with small capital could bear 'Fleet Street' expenses. On propagandist grounds it was wisdom and economy to incur them.

9.—All I have now to do, is to report the whole moneys ever received by me on public grounds from 1853 to 1858, and explain what I have done with them. The following balance sheet gives these items:—

* In carrying away the business books of his department under this pretence, Wilks involved us in some £60 of loss. The law gave no means of recovering the books except by arrest, which he could have avoided by giving up the books. Any 'cruelty' to him comes from his advisers, or from his own persistency in wrong.

† *Vide* § 12 and § 14 previous report. Unless he had legal power to prosecute, the House must have been given up long ago. In 1855 my brother prosecuted as my partner in the case of Day, as later in the case of Wilks.

PROPAGANDIST BALANCE SHEET OF THE FLEET STREET HOUSE,

FROM CHRISTMAS, 1853, TO CHRISTMAS, 1857.

RECEIVED.		EXPENDED.	
	£	s.	d.
To PROPAGANDIST FUND.			
1854... Vol. 16... Nos. 393 to 422 <i>Reasoner</i>	166	0	4
Vol. 17... Nos. 423 to 448	51	2	0
1855... Vol. 18... Nos. 449 to 461	78	5	8
Vol. 19... Nos. 462 to 500	93	2	0
1856... Vol. 20... Nos. 501 to 526	157	10	2
Vol. 21... Nos. 527 to 552	85	15	4
1857... Vol. 22... Nos. 553 to 605	181	18	8
To Surplus on the Sale of the <i>Reasoner</i> over Printing Expenses for 1855, Vols. 18 and 19	10	10	9
Ditto for 1856, Vol. 20	1	14	0
To Subscriptions not included in the Propagandist Fund above—W. J. B., £200; M., £10; G. B., £10; Dan Mitchell, £5; Mr. T. Watts, £10; A Friend in the Midland Counties, £5	240	0	0
Proceeds of the Bazaar of 1857	155	19	9
(This amount will be further increased when some articles, yet remaining, are sold.)			
To Balance of Propagandist Expenses due	1523	3	10½
<hr/>			
<i>March 15th, 1858.</i>			
	£2,745	2	6½

'We have examined the vouchers of the above balance sheet, and find them correct.—JOHN GORDON CRAWFORD, HENRY THOMAS.'

10.—As in this report the object is to show what money has actually been appropriated by me, the expense of collecting the 'Propagandist Fund' must be mentioned. The expense is quite what it is here put. Fifteen per cent. does not cover the full expense of circulars, reports, letters, postages, the personal correspondence and acknowledgments involved in its collection. Those who are aware that money cannot be given away judiciously without cost and considerable trouble, will readily understand that it cannot be collected without labour and expense. The time consumed in communications is very great. It is due in courtesy to correspond with subscribers. It is also a pleasure to do so, but expense is the inevitable consequence. Though this expenditure of money, it is to be remembered, is not always loss. The pamphlets and papers constantly remitted, and information given, influence opinion, as well as continue subscribers. Thus the collection of funds assists propagandism. We have never previously mentioned the cost of collecting funds, and have always been credited with all moneys acknowledged. Many important items included in the Propagandist Fund, have been as much payment for personal services as for public. Many persons, to whom interest has been due, have ordered it acknowledged as their subscription, and in lieu of their usual subscription. Such items do not, therefore, represent actual cash received. Some subscriptions have appeared which have never been paid. Of £5 acknowledged, two years ago, from 'Anthony Collins,' Editor of the *Investigator*, £2 10s. is yet due; as he has publicly stated that he refuses to make good his word, because I have broken mine, in declaring the House as 'private property' which I formerly said was a 'public institution.*' Deeming it advantageous to Secularism that its Propagandist Fund should appear well, it has been credited with all sums possible.

11.—The loans existing in the form of Debentures (which after this report will be made the subject of a new communication to the holders) bear no interest; but, allowing for these amounts, more than £1000 has been chargeable with interest during the past four years; and as this is a sum which was never borrowed for my own uses, and has not been employed to my advantage, the interest paid for it is not chargeable to me, as it would be had it been employed in the business.

12.—Of the £100, referred to in § 12 of previous report, half has been repaid in settlement. The item of £300 for losses is under rather than over the amount, extending from May, 1853, to December 30th, 1857. Purely business losses are not here included. The losses here aggregated arise from defalcations, etc., Tithe seizures, and risks incurred on public grounds. One fruitful source of loss has arisen through the heavy responsibilities incurred, without capital to meet them or to advance the business with. At some conjunctures I have had to accept engagements from home to earn money, when as much has been lost by my absence as has been gained by my work. But to earn present cash, when the Propagandist Fund fell short, was so imperative, that any amount of future loss had to be disregarded, in face of the danger of not meeting rent, taxes, or other imperative demands. The £300 in the balance sheet is not the full amount of these losses. But the balance sheet is restricted to amounts about which there can be no dispute.

13.—If the balance due be paid, I shall be merely saved from loss. The 'Property of the House' is simply an onerous responsibility, only to be accepted from a sense of duty to the cause to be served. It is said that when an Eastern prince wishes to ruin a dependent he presents him with an elephant, which he dare not kill, and cannot sell, and which it must impoverish him to keep. Under existing circumstances, the Fleet Street House will be such a gift to whomsoever accepts it, as no one at present can calculate on the united support of the Freethought party. Before the doors of the House were opened,

* We need not remark, to any acquainted with the facts of the case, that this is untrue. What we said was, that the House was 'necessarily private property until it was cleared,' when it was intended 'to be relinquished as public property,' and neither the position of the House, nor the professions of the Director, have varied one iota to this hour, in word or deed.

Mr. Southwell wrote pamphlets against us, and immediately after Mr. Cooper wrote articles, nor has the *Investigator* at any time aided us. Publications, personally directed against us, which we should have refused to publish against others, have found publishers in what are called our own ranks. Under these circumstances, we do not expect very early to realise expenses in the House.*

14.—As to the balance of £1523,† no society or committee authorised me to take any such steps, for the sufficient reason, that no persons were willing to incur such responsibility. When certain important and expected assistance failed (mentioned in the previous report), there was no choice but to go back after a commencement had been publicly made, or go forward alone. My explanation is now, as then, and ever has been, if any one else would have incurred the risks required, I should not.

15.—The views taken of the matter by a colleague at the time, sometimes recurs to me. Mr. Southwell, the frankest opponent of all within our own ranks, called one day, when he was under the belief that the money had been given with which the House was opened. I took out of the chest certain correspondence relative to the bonds and bills I had signed—the security I had given, in the way of whatever personal property I possessed. Mr. Southwell, on looking for a moment at them, remarked, in words more emphatic than select, ‘Well, all I can say is, Jacob, you are a damned fool.’

16.—The difficulties of the duties undertaken by me are not seen by everyone. So long as the Secular cause seemed poor, the world disregarded it. Yet, as soon as the occupation of the Fleet Street House had somewhat improved the appearance of the party, and commanded some respect for its humbler adherents, some said ‘we were seeking to make Secularism “respectable,”’ in a base and servile sense. The tendency of this was to take away the sympathy and support of those for whom so many risks and so much anxiety had been incurred. Nor could I publicly ask for aid very earnestly—that were to imply that our affairs were precarious—when all but the very generous forsake a sinking cause. As, moreover, the subscriptions of friends were greatly disproportionate to the expense incurred, I was obliged to borrow money to prevent the loss of what had been given, and on this account, I could never explain our full need, without giving to those who had lent the impression that they would never be repaid. This was at once to destroy the very credit upon which I had to depend. At no time could I say distinctly that I was not supported—that would have been a reflection on our party, which I, as its defender, was forbidden to speak, though I was being embarrassed, and perhaps ruined, because of my silence. Of all men, it was not for me to fill the mouth of the enemy. Again, when I had asked for aid once, I had to abide by the accidental response. To ask often was to weary the generous, or to become suspected by the unfriendly as seeking my personal interest merely. Experience teaches me that publicism is not always a safe investment of health, or reputation, or peace. If any man think that it is not misconstruction, a peril, a labour, and often an unshared solicitude, let him listen to this narrative and be undeceived. My valued mentor, Mr. Place, taught me, years ago, that Propagandism is toil while it continues—dissappointment if it fails—misrepresentation if it succeeds; its reward, many sincere friends; its penalty, many active and implacable enemies. On entering upon the combat I well knew the conditions, and do not shrink from them now; but there is another side to the medal, and upon that I prefer to look. Those friends of Freethought best able to advance it, and who make the greatest sacrifices to aid it, whose esteem is a privilege and whose confidence is honour, have never ceased to approve the course we have taken. It would be the greatest possible injustice to the Secularists generally, to leave it to be supposed that they are responsible for proceedings we have here been

* We may quote the testimony of an objector in confirmation. Mr. Farrah’s final balance sheet of the Publishing department for 1857 showed only £127 of proceeds, and it omitted £100 of risks and expenses devolving upon us to find, and which ought to be realised in that department alone before the business can be said ‘to pay.’

† Less £60, as proceeds of my own lectures during 1856-7, as denoted elsewhere—a subscription I find myself unable to continue.

called upon to notice. By whose generous act (exceeding all I ever experienced or expected) I was enabled to free myself from the strange opponents by whom our operations were lately hampered, and to vindicate the rights of the House in courts of law, I may one day have the pleasure to tell. But so long as personal acknowledgment is impossible, I beg him here to accept the thanks of one whose pride it is to write injuries in sand, but to cherish the tone of a kind word and the recollection of a generous act to the last hour of life, and bequeath their remembrance as an inheritance to his children.

17.—To resume details: Deducting from the £1,221 the total amount received during four years, £950 (the salary of myself from 1854 to 1858, and of Mr. A. Holyoake during two years), there remains but £271 received towards the purchase of the 'property of the House.'

18.—The business proceeds of 1857, the most methodical year we have had yet, were as follows:—

Expenditure: rent, gas, taxes, insurance, depreciation of stock, etc., <i>exclusive</i> of items inserted in the	
Propagandist Balance Sheet	£310
Income from publishing, rents, etc.	208
	—
Current deficiency	£102
	—

Were we to include in current expenses the salary of Mr. A. Holyoake, certain law expenses, losses, and expense of collecting funds, the deficiency would require the whole of my salary to meet it. Assertions that the proceeds of the business yield a surplus over expenses, rest on the very insufficient authority of Mr. Farrah, who, on leaving, presented a balance sheet of his department, making the profits £232 for the year. Owing to errors in it, it was rejected. He then presented a second, making the profits to be £132. This was rejected for the same reason. He presented a third, in which the profits were put at £120. This too was erroneous. He then brought up a fourth, in which the profits had fallen to £101. We have preserved these curious balance sheets in his own handwriting.

19.—On November 26th, 1857, a meeting of the promoters was called in London, by Mr. Maughan, Vice-president of the London Secular Society. About fifty subscribers and debenture holders were summoned. The first meeting was held at 70, Fenchurch Street, and adjourned to 147, Fleet Street, on the motion of a gentleman who thought that I ought to be present to constitute a fair and legitimate meeting, and, on November 29th following, I, by request, met the gentlemen assembled. *The substance of this report and balance sheet was then given in answer to remarks made, and, at the close, the resolution was passed which requests me to take the House into my own hands.* I think it best to act on this resolution, and, unless I hear from you to the contrary in the course of fourteen days, I shall conclude that the step recommended has your approval also.*

20.—I need scarcely add that my endeavour will still be to continue the House as a centre of communication for friends of progress at home and abroad—not like a *shop*, purely devoted to business—not like a *hall*, open only occasionally—but always accessible and always available as now, with a committee room, constantly used, as now, by the leaders of progressive movements, and to conduct the business as heretofore, consistently with Secular principles.

21.—As to the amount of expenses due, as per balance sheet now rendered, the proceeds of future Bazaars and the surplus which may arise from the Institute Fund and special subscriptions will contribute to clear it off.

22.—The subscriptions acknowledged in the *Reasoner* under the head of 'Institute Fund,' are intended to defray the aforesaid balance of Propagandist expenses incurred, and to provide for the editorship of the *Reasoner*, with the engrossing duties arising out of its advocacy, £200 annually, or such proportion of that sum as may be required, while the surplus proceeds of its

* See resolution quoted in full, p. 1 of this report.

sale fall below that amount. The editor of the *Reasoner* will stand, in relation to the public, in the position of an independent representative and advocate of Secular principles, and on this ground, and for these services alone, will he be understood to receive a salary as a claim for work done, or as a means of doing it.

23.—In the previous report no formal mention was made of the Socialist leaders of 1838-42. The reason was that explicitly stated in the 'preface' of the said report—namely, that that narrative was confined to those who had *directly* acted in the specific movement, resulting in the Fleet Street House. To many Socialists, individual acknowledgments are due. Mr. Owen himself joined in the loans made at the opening of the House, and, indirectly, Secularism owes much to the *precursory* exertions of the party of which Mr. Owen is the honoured representative. Had we been writing the history of the Social Reform movement (a work in the efficient hands of Mr. Pare) there would have been found, as was said in the aforesaid preface, 'very full recognition of the eminent services of others.'

24.—During the past year steps have been taken to effect the release of Mr. Thomas Pooley, a poor Cornish well-sinker, of Liskeard, sentenced, by Mr. Justice Coleridge, to one year and nine months' imprisonment, for the alleged offence of blasphemy. Before five months' of his imprisonment had expired, Sir George Grey, Bart., Home Secretary, was induced 'to advise' Her Majesty to grant him a 'free pardon.' This, we believe, is the first sentence of the kind ever reversed. The progress of public opinion may be seen in this instance. When my own imprisonment occurred in 1842, though the chief witness admitted to the court that I merely answered a question which, honestly, I could not otherwise answer as to sentiment, though the terms of the answer might have been improved—yet no person out of doors thought of asking for my liberation by the Home Secretary of that day. I owed to Mr. Roebuck, M.P., the permission given by Sir James Graham to sit up in the winter nights till nine o'clock, without fire and without light. This was all. Mr. Pooley's language, much more indefensible, did not prevent us obtaining for him a free pardon. Certainly, this success is owing to the wider appliances commanded by the Institute, and the better recognised position attained by Secularists. We next proceed to ask of Parliament a law of Affirmation, operative for all who conscientiously object to oaths.

G. J. Holyoake.

147, Fleet Street, London, E.C.

On March 14th, the following gentlemen, representing the oldest friends of Secular principles in the Metropolis, and also new, outside, and distant promoters in the English provinces and in Scotland, loan holders, and many aiding but not identified with the Secular party, met and heard the preceding report read, when they unanimously signed the following declaration :—*

March 14th, 1858.

We find the report read quite satisfactory, and the items of expenditure in the balance sheet justifiably inserted.

* J. G. CRAWFORD,	W. TURLEY,	W. MUCKLESTON,
* HENRY THOMAS,	NATHAN ROBINSON,	HENRY ALLSOP IVORY.
CHARLES CLEMENTS,	ALFRED M. MITCHELL.	

The gentlemen whose names are marked with asterisks were appointed as special auditors on the part of all.

* The chairman of the two previous meetings of promoters, passing the resolution stated in p. 1, was invited to take part in it, but was unable to do so from prior engagement.